

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS AND DANCE

PAINTING PARADISE FOR A POST-COLONIAL PACIFIC:
THE FIJIAN FRESCOES OF JEAN CHARLOT

By

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This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk

Ka waihona o ka na'auao

The repository of learning

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jean Charlot's fresco murals in the Pacific Islands of Hawai'i and Fiji represent the work of a mature artist, one who brought to the creation of art a multicultural heritage, an international background, and a lifetime of work spanning the first seven decades of the twentieth century. The investigation into any of Charlot's Pacific artworks requires consideration of his earlier artistic "periods" in France, Mexico, and the United States. Charlot devoted his life to the creation of liturgical arts and public artworks. His investigations of art, culture, and history resulted in a wide variety of achievements in the verbal and visual arts. Charlot's frescoes are surprising in the sheer number of monumental artworks that he completed during his lifetime. Many of his fresco murals show an amazing sensitivity to local cultures, and the majority of them are still available for public viewing today. There is no doubt in my mind that Charlot was the premier muralist working in the Pacific Islands in the twentieth century.

My discussion will focus on the Fijian frescoes because of my background as a Pacific art historian and my opinion that Charlot's Fijian frescoes represent some of his best and most interesting artworks. As a student, scholar, and lecturer, I lived and worked in Hawai'i for over ten years. It was in Hawai'i that I began to appreciate Charlot's contributions to Pacific Island art, history, and culture. My first encounter with Charlot was through my research on Hawaiian body adornment in hula, as part of my Master of Arts program in art history at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, when I discovered his rare audio-taped interview with "Auntie" Jennie Wilson, a court dancer for King David Kalakaua, the last reigning sovereign of Hawai'i. It was at that time I began to be cognizant of Charlot's artistic achievements in the Pacific, that the numerous examples of public art I had observed on the University of Hawai'i at Manoa campus and throughout the Hawaiian Islands were created by a single artist, Jean Charlot. Upon further investigation, I was surprised by the absence of scholarship on Charlot's Pacific Period, especially considering his work in Hawai'i for thirty years, where he created numerous visual and verbal artworks addressing Hawaiian cultural themes. I

was intrigued initially by Charlot's Fijian frescoes because they seemed to be relatively unknown, even to many of the scholars who were aware of his work in Hawai'i. The more I learned about Charlot's Fijian frescoes, the more I realized how important they were, and continue to be, in the history of Pacific Island art.

My research on, as well as the subsequent restoration of, Jean Charlot's Fijian frescoes was accomplished, in part, thanks to generous grants from the Jean Charlot Foundation, Florida State University and private donors, particularly Diana and Jim Barickman, Trude and Charles Espinoza, and Richard and Janet Kluxdal. These monies helped to pay for my on-site research in Hawai'i and Fiji. I offer my gratitude to all the Charlot Family, especially to John P. Charlot, for allowing me access and permission to publish materials from the Jean Charlot Collection and Estate, for his "mural tour," and for sharing his insights into his father's artworks, and to Martin Charlot, for sharing his technical knowledge of fresco, for permission to photograph and reproduce his father's artworks residing in his private collection, and for his time and energy as our leader in "team fresco."

In Hawai'i, I wish to extend my thanks to Nancy Morris for her assistance in my research, for sharing her knowledge and ideas about Hawaiian muralists, and for her editorial comments. I would also like to thank Bronwen Solyom of the Jean Charlot Collection and the staff at the Pacific Collection at Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa for all their help with my archival research. I offer my appreciation to the many friends of Jean Charlot who shared their time and thoughts with me: in Hawai'i, Monsignor Daniel Devor, Cobey Black and Barbara Pirie; and, in Fiji, Weetie Watson, Judy and David Zundel, Pat Watson, and Beverly McElrath. In Hawai'i, I would also like to thank the Richardson family and Kahua Ranch for allowing me to photograph Charlot's fresco, *The Holy Family*. In Hawai'i, a special *mahalo* (thanks) to Evelyn Giddings for giving me my first lesson in fresco technique and to Matauma Alisa for allowing me to listen to his interview with Nancy Morris, where he shared his insights in regards to Pacific Island muralists.

In Fiji, *vinaka vaka levu* (a big thank you) to the Catholic Church, especially Archbishop Petero Mataka, the staff of Nicolas House, Suva, and Father Eremodo

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I would like to acknowledge all who assisted with the restoration of Charlot's Fijian frescoes. As part of an effort to conserve the paintings, I worked in various capacities and in conjunction with the Fiji government, especially with Sivia Qoro, who, at the time, was the Director of Women, Culture, and Heritage for the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. In the Ra district, Viti Levu, I wish to thank the Catholic Church; the staff of the Rakiraki Hotel; the students in the carpentry course of Summer 2001 at Nakauvadra High School; local business and citizens of the Ra District, Fiji, especially the late Tui Navitilevu Ratu Bolobolo. A special thank you to the Jean Charlot Foundation, John Charlot, Martin Charlot, and the Charlot family, and friends of the Charlots, particularly Weetie Watson. Through my own efforts and with the assistance of the above-mentioned people and institutions, I was able to organize, fund, participate in and witness the complete restoration of the frescoes during my last trip to Fiji in June-July 2001. The project included the partial restoration of the deteriorating church building that houses the frescoes, particularly the repair to doors and windows with the addition of screens to keep out birds and bugs. The cleaning and conserving of the paintings was headed by Martin Charlot, who trained "team fresco," a group of "hard working souls" that included myself, Kawena Charlot, and a number of local Fijians: Etuate Naucukidi Katalau, Sr. Udite Ratawake, Sakiusa Naweia, Adi Akisi Ramasina,

Lani Buadromo, Sirilo Rakesa, Samuela Vanini, and Sevuloni Vanavana. We all worked tirelessly for over one month to finish the project. The entire project was successful in completing not only the goals of conserving the paintings, but also in renewing the interest of the public both locally and nationally. Additionally, the project generated interest in the artist of the frescoes, and a memorial service was held to honor the artist on 22 June 2001. The memorial service marked the first shared service between Fijian Methodists and Catholics in the District of Ra.

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JCC	Jean Charlot Collection, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
CKK	Caroline Katherine Klarr
JJU	Jesse James Ulrick
JJ	Jana Jandrokovic
MC	Martin Charlot

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Fijian forms are cited according to A New Fijian Dictionary, edited by A. Capell, unless marked with an asterik which indicates Fijian forms are not listed in Capell and are cited according to my on-site research in the Ra district, Viti Levu, Fiji.

FIJIAN*	ENGLISH
<i>bilu</i>	serving cup
<i>ibe</i>	mats
<i>ika</i>	fish
<i>i yau</i>	woman's cultural wealth
<i>kilikili</i>	small stones
<i>lali</i>	native wooden drum
<i>magimagi</i>	sennit cord on <i>tanoa</i>
<i>magiti</i>	food, food offerings, feast
<i>mana</i>	divine or intrinsic power
<i>manu</i>	bird
<i>masi</i>	bark cloth
<i>matai</i>	one skilled in a thing; native carpenter
<i>meke</i>	performance to music, dance
<i>meke iri</i>	fan dance
<i>meke i wau</i>	dance with war club
<i>meke ni yaqona</i>	movement system accompanying formal serving of <i>yaqona</i> .
<i>qaravi yaqona</i>	to look after the serving of <i>yaqona</i>
<i>tabua</i>	whale's tooth
<i>tali</i>	to plait, weave
<i>tanoa</i>	serving bowl for <i>yaqona</i> or <i>kava</i>

<i>ti*</i>	plant
<i>sasa</i>	indigenous whisk broom
<i>sere</i>	informal music and dance
<i>sevusevu</i>	ceremonial presentational gift of <i>yaqona</i>
<i>sulu</i>	lower body cover
<i>tabu</i>	restricted, taboo
<i>uto</i>	breadfruit
<i>vaka vini vinaka*</i>	good-bye, thank you ceremony
<i>vanua</i>	land, region, place
<i>veqaravi*</i>	welcoming ceremony
<i>vo'ivo'i</i>	pandanas mat
<i>vonu</i>	turtle
<i>waka</i>	root
<i>yaqona</i>	ceremonial drink of native pepper root

HAWAIIAN GLOSSARY

HAWAIIAN*

ENGLISH

Hawaiian forms are cited according to Hawaiian-English Dictionary, edited by Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel Elbert (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986).

<i>'aina</i>	land
<i>ali'i</i>	nobility, chief
<i>ali'i nui</i>	high chief
<i>haole</i>	any foreigner
<i>hula</i>	Hawaiian performance art and dance
<i>hula ki'i</i>	puppet hula
<i>kaona</i>	veiled meanings
<i>kapa</i>	native barkcloth
<i>kapu</i>	restricted, taboo
<i>kava</i>	ceremonial drink of native pepper root, *generic name in Polynesia
<i>kupa</i>	native to the land
<i>malihini</i>	stranger, foreigner
<i>mana</i>	divine or intrinsic power
<i>manu</i>	bird
<i>mele</i>	chant, song
<i>mele inoa</i>	name chant, song
<i>nui</i>	big
<i>pahu</i>	drum
<i>pua</i>	flower, lover, community, child
<i>tapa</i>	barkcloth
<i>ulu</i>	breadfruit

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the altar murals created by Jean Charlot at St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Mission, Naiserelagi village, Ra District, Fiji Islands. The church houses three of Charlot's frescoes, a triptych over the main altar and single panels over each of the two transept altars. Painted between October 1962 and January 1963, the central triptych, *The Black Christ and Worshipers*, measures ten by thirty feet and features a crucified Black Christ, while the side panels depict full body portraits of indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians presenting culturally appropriate offerings to Christ. The two side altar panels, *St. Joseph's Workshop* and *The Annunciation*, each measure ten by twelve feet.

During his lifetime, 1898-1979, Charlot refined his knowledge of the fresco technique and painted murals at forty-five different sites in Mexico, the United States, and the Pacific Islands of Hawai'i and Fiji.¹ I concentrate on Charlot's contributions as a mature artist by focusing on his little-known liturgical frescoes in Fiji. This text is the first serious academic study to document the history, social contexts, and commission of any of his frescoes in the Pacific Islands. Through my investigation, I demonstrate how his later Pacific works expressed relationships with local cultures and drew from his earlier experiences in France and Mexico. I explore the relationship that developed among artist, artwork, and audience. I argue that Charlot conceptualized his artistic works as "signs" that operated within both aesthetic and communication systems cross-culturally. I reconfigure signs within their cultural contexts to determine meaning from both the synchronic perspective of the artist, as well as a diachronic and multicultural perspective based on the three cultural groups who compose the major audience, Fijian, Indo-Fijian, and European. I address the history of liturgical art in the twentieth century by offering

the first scholarly text to document thoroughly a major art form, Charlot's "Black Christ," in the syncretistic traditions of the Catholic Church as experienced in the Pacific Islands/Fiji.

Charlot's Fijian frescoes embodied ideas integral to the future of the Catholic Church. In his Fijian murals, Charlot's incorporated local models, indigenous objects, and native flora, capturing the religious climate of the early 1960s and the changes brought about by Vatican II, changes that sought to define the future direction of the Church in relation to indigenous cultures in mission areas. While not overtly political, these ideas led to liberation theological movements, especially, Black theology, and, as such, advocated socio-political independence. As a colonized nation, Fiji's future in the 1960s depended on indigenous representation and self-determination. Charlot's *Black Christ*, with its native savior as the head of the Church, symbolized Fijian leadership and, by extension, sovereignty.

Although Charlot's Fijian frescoes were a liturgical commission, the illustration of Fijian Black Christ triptych articulated post-colonial values. A public artwork, the Fijian frescoes transcended time, ethnic, and religious boundaries, extending even into the realms of national society. As a citizen of the United States, Charlot had pledged his belief in "one people under God." In his Fijian triptych, he promoted the idea of the "peace of God" and a universal humanity by presenting the diversity of creation; he painted the major ethnic groups of Fiji, native Fijian and Indo-Fijian, coming together as equals, regardless of social status, cultural background, or ethnicity. In Fiji, as in Hawai'i, Charlot's murals implicitly empowered Pacific Islanders through his monumental public images. He depicted local peoples within their cultural contexts and represented them as equals, not only in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of the colonialists who dominated them. In his Fijian frescoes, Charlot painted a Fijian Black Christ and a natural "Paradise" for an audience of viewers in a post-colonial Pacific.

Endnotes

1 Zohmah Charlot, Jean Charlot Books, Portfolios, Writings, Murals (Honolulu: Private printing, 1986). Appendix 1. Jean Charlot's Fresco Murals.